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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S. BEEF IMPORTS TO TAIWAN

¶1. Summary: On November 4, Taiwan's major Chinese-language and English-language dailies continued to give extensive coverage to the controversy caused by the Taiwan government decision to allow the import of U.S. beef and beef products. The pro-independence "Liberty Times" ran a front-page banner headline reading "The United States Warns That Setting Limitations on U.S. Beef [Imports] Is Inconsistent with the Agreement [It Signed with Taiwan]." The KMT-leaning "China Times," on the other hand, ran a front-page banner headline reading "Legislative Yuan Rushes to Amend the Law to Block U.S. Beef Imports."

¶2. Editorials and op-ed pieces in Taiwan's papers continued to direct their criticism against the import of U.S. beef and offal at the poor accountability and credibility of the Ma administration. A column and an op-ed in the pro-independence "Liberty Times," a "China Times" editorial, and an editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" all lambasted the Ma administration for its opaque decision-making process. Several op-ed pieces have linked the beef issue with the year-end city mayors' and county magistrates' elections around the island and urged the public to vote against the ruling KMT in the upcoming elections. A "China Times" commentary criticized the pro-DPP Green camp for trying to use the beef storm to beat up on the KMT and to fool the voters during the election campaigning. An op-ed in the China-focused "Want Daily" criticized Taiwan National Security Council Secretary General Su Chi for seeking to link the decision to import U.S. beef with the talks over the U.S.-Taiwan free trade agreement and U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, saying that these are all separate issues. A separate "China Times" op-ed, written by an associate professor in food science, however, urged the public to look at the beef issue rationally and said Taiwan does not have to renegotiate the beef deal at the expense of its national credibility. An editorial in the conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" cited the previous cases of referenda in Taiwan and said a referendum on U.S. beef imports will not succeed in the end. End summary.

A) "Ma Ying-jeou Is Still Fooling [the Taiwan People]!"

The "Free Talk" column in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 680,000] wrote (11/4):

"The fact that the Ma Ying-jeou administration, given its black-box [decision-making] process, has signed an 'unequal treaty' [with the United States] on the imports of U.S. beef and thus sold out the health of the Taiwan people has triggered [many] repercussions. In order to 'put out the fire,' the Ma administration has worked out a series of administration measures on the one hand, and some Blue camp people, on the other hand, have stepped forward to demand that [the Ma administration] renegotiate the deal. But a close look [into all these actions] can tell [you] that Ma is just playing a double-faced strategy; all these are nothing but feigning political movements to fool the [Taiwan] people! ...

"The Ma administration claimed earlier that the agreement signed between Taiwan and the United States has precedence over domestic

law, but now it is arguing that a series of administrative measures will be able to block the imports of [U.S.] beef offal. [The move] is akin to slapping one's own face; will the [Taiwan] people allow Ma to continue fooling them at his will?"

B) "Looking at Taiwan's Security from [the Perspective of] Beef and Ma"

Columnist Paul Lin wrote in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 680,000] (11/4):

"... Evidently, the import of some risky parts of U.S. beef into Taiwan has triggered people's alarm over their health and safety. If the Ma administration does not want to renegotiate the deal [with the United States], it will be difficult to resolve this safety and health problem. ... China's opposition against the United States normally stems from its ideology and need to vie for supremacy, while Ma is inducing the [Taiwan] public to oppose the United States in an attempt to cater to China and in the hope that the U.S. government will not expose his green card and tax matters.

"The United States is Taiwan's best friend and the interests between the two cannot be separated. This is the history and the truth. Taiwan purchasing products from the United States serves the United States' interests, but it must not endanger Taiwan's major interests. Ma is hypocritical in the way that he tries to curry favor with the United States by taking care of U.S. interests while sacrificing the health of the Taiwan people. What really benefits both countries is Taiwan's military procurements from the United States, because that is also what Taiwan needs for its own security.

Ma is evil-minded in the way that he has been sabotaging Taiwan's arms procurement from the United States for a long time while now he is trying to curry favor with the United States by sacrificing the

health of his people. To resolve such a predicament, the Ma administration should first admit its mistake to the U.S. government that it has failed to take Taiwan's public opinion into consideration. Only by apologizing sincerely [to the United States] can there be a chance for the United States to consider reopening the talks [on U.S. beef] ..."

C) "[The Ma Administration] Should Have Stuck to Its Original Scenario Had It Known Earlier"

The KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 120,000] editorialized (11/4):

"With the [Taiwan people] remaining indignant over the U.S. beef issue, the question that the public wants to know badly is: Could it be possible that no one [in the Taiwan government] has ever anticipated what would happen? Be it over-confident or cocky, one thing is for sure: namely, the high-ranking [Taiwan] officials have totally overlooked the impact [of the decision to import U.S. beef]. ... Prior to the [decision to] open Taiwan's market to U.S. beef, had the [Taiwan] authorities actually gone over step by step the possible reactions of the public? Have they really thought it over that as a responsible government, they should provide sufficient, detailed and accurate information on U.S. beef to the people? Information such as which country allows import of which part [of U.S. beef], and which parts of the beef the Taiwan government plans to allow to import and which does not are what the Ma administration was obliged to tell its people before it made the decision to open the Taiwan market to U.S. beef. ..."

D) "An International Deal Is Closely Related to the Credibility of a Nation"

Associate Professor Lee Hsiu-chin from Tajen University's Department of Food Science and Technology opined in the KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 120,000] (11/4):

"... Given the [parts of] U.S. beef that the Department of Health decided to import, the chances for getting ill by eating the most risky part (i.e. ground beef) are 5.77 in ten billion. Some people argued that 'we must not import it as long as the chance of getting ill is not zero.' Such logic resulted from unlimited exaggeration actually will not help to clarify the issue. No food can be said to be 'one hundred percent' safe. The Taiwan people have consumed

boneless U.S. beef for three years now, which also carries a risk of 7.18 out of a trillion. Does that mean we have to ban the boneless beef as well? The goal that public health is after should be to work out an acceptable risk standard. ... In terms of U.S. beef, the international standard is the one set by the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), which excludes all the specified risk materials --the distal ileum of the small intestine and the tonsils, and the remaining parts of the cattle are safe to eat. The protocol that Taiwan signed with the United States has actually adopted a stricter and more limited standard than that of the OIE. ...

"The next question then comes to: Can Taiwan unilaterally repudiate the protocol it signed with the United States? The answer is yes. It's not that [we] cannot do it, but the question is how much are [we] willing to pay to do so? ... The key lies in the fact that given Taiwan's difficult situation in the international community, its credibility is the island's biggest asset. If Taiwan can rashly repudiate a written international agreement, what else does it have to win the trust of its allies or the international community?

"Finally, if the public has overwhelming doubts about U.S. beef, what we should do is prevent the import of those controversial parts [of the cattle] via powerful administrative measures under the pre-condition that we do not violate the obligations stipulated in our agreement. ..."

E) "Playing the U.S. Beef Card to Fool the Voters for Their Votes"

The "Short Commentary" column in the KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 120,000] (11/4):

"In the face of the mounting rage against U.S. beef in [Taiwan] society, the Green camp decided recently not to beat up on the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement [that Taiwan is planning to sign with China] but to play the card of U.S. beef. Frank Hsieh, the DPP's former presidential candidate, even said that as long as the DPP can win seven seats in the year-end city mayors' and county magistrates' elections, the Central Government will have to renegotiate the [beef] deal with the United States and thus ban the beef products that carry the risk of mad cow disease from coming into Taiwan. But we dare guarantee that even if the Green camp wins all the seats in the year-end elections, the Central Government will not re-start the talks with the United States. ..."

F) "Beef, Free Trade Agreement, and Security in the Taiwan Strait"

Chen Yu-chun, a Taiwan academic now working as a senior research fellow at China's Tsinghua University, opined in the China-focused "Want Daily" [circulation: 10,000] (11/4):

"... [Taiwan's] National Security Council official used [the signing of] a free trade agreement to emphasize why Taiwan had to yield to the United States [over the import of U.S. beef]. But [the signing of] a U.S.-Taiwan free trade agreement is an issue that has existed for a long time. It is very naive to say that once Taiwan opens its market to U.S. beef, Washington will sign the agreement with Taipei. ...

"The democratic government of Japan recently adjusted Japan's security relations with the United States, a move that has drawn grave concerns from the United States, which has already openly urged Tokyo not to endanger the foundation of the Japan-U.S. alliance. If Japan is altering [its policy], Washington will only attach more importance to Taiwan's strategic position rather than weakening it. At the current stage, China and the United States are in a situation 'where they fight with each other without breaking [the relationship], vie against each other without going to war.' How is it possible that Washington will cast Taiwan's security interests aside just in exchange for the beef trade that is of a non-strategic level and thereby impact the United States' grand strategic plan for China?"

G) "A Referendum on Beef Imports from the United States?"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (11/4):

"Taiwan's Consumers' Foundation and a few other private non-profit organizations, including the Housewives' Association, are planning to propose a referendum on the importation of American beef and beef products that may by a one-in-a-billion chance cause bovine spongiform encephalopathy or mad cow disease. ... We wish we could wish them success. But we are afraid they won't get the endorsement of enough voters to make the commission call the nation's fifth referendum, even if the initial requirement of one tenth of the signatures may be fulfilled. They must be reminded that none of the four previous referendums were validated for lack of achieving the necessary quorum of half of the electorate.

"One thing we can't understand is why organizers of the American beef boycott campaign should try to beat a dead horse. As was pointed out yesterday in a commentary article in Monday's edition of this newspaper, the beef war between Taiwan and the United States is over. The agreement won't be renegotiated, while people are free to boycott risky ground and bone-in beef as well as offal. The Department of Health has promised to ban them if there arises a legitimate fear that the imports may spread any disease. As a matter of fact, even without any boycott, the people of Taiwan, save a few steak lovers, will venture to try American beef and beef products they may consider unsafe for consumption. ..."

H) "Accountability Is Issue in Taiwan-U.S. Beef Flap"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (11/4):

"Yesterday's consensus among all parties in the Legislative Yuan to rapidly approve a legal ban on the importation of beef products with especially high risk of contamination of "mad cow disease" sent an important message to President Ma Ying-jeou's Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) government and decision-makers in Washington and Beijing that voices of the Taiwan people cannot be ignored. ... The promulgation of the market opening Monday evening together with the announcement of Cabinet plans to adopt various technical measures, such as demanding the defrosting of ground beef for inspection or denying import permits, to technically obstruct the full opening of the Taiwan market to U.S. beef was greeted with considerable scepticism. Such scepticism is fully justified since it would be difficult for the KMT government to explain to Washington why it was obstructing a newly signed market - opening agreement. ...

"Besides announcing the consensus to approve the proposed revisions by Nov. 17, Legislative Yuan President Wang Jin-pyng called on the Cabinet to keep the door closed to such imports until the new revisions were approved. The spotlight will now be shifted back to the KMT to see whether the ruling party will use its nearly three-fourths legislative majority to approve the revisions in the face of anticipated pressure from the U.S. on the Taiwan government to fully implement the protocol it just signed with Washington.

"Besides welcoming the KMT government's announcement of the protocol to 'fully open its market to American beef and beef products' Monday, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Trade Representative Office issued a veiled warning to the Taiwan

government not to subvert the protocol by stating that Washington is 'currently reviewing' the Cabinet's 'additional domestic measures' in order 'to ensure they allow Taiwan consumers the opportunity to enjoy the same safe American beef and beef products that American families eat.' The problem is that many Taiwan consumers do not dare to 'enjoy' such products because they lack confidence that they are indeed 'safe,' concerns which received a timely boost by news reports of two deaths in the U.S. linked to the consumption of fresh ground beef believed to be contaminated by E. coli bacteria. The exposure of the vulnerability of the KMT government to popular anger could not have come at a better time since the Ma government is now preparing to begin talks with the People's Republic of China on an 'economic cooperation framework agreement' which poses a far greater threat to the livelihood and security of the Taiwan people."

STANTON